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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 001580

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DEPT. FOR EUR/WE, NEA, SA;
OSD FOR DASD FATA

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TAGS: PREL NATO MOPS IZ AF IT

SUBJECT: ITALY: DEFENSE MINISTER PARISI TELLS AMB. GOI
FOREIGN POLICY WILL BE BASED ON FRIENDSHIP WITH THE U.S.
AND BUILDING A STRONG EUROPE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD SPOGLI. REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

Summary

¶1. (C) In the Ambassador's May 23 introductory call on new Italian Defense Minister Arturo Parisi, Parisi stressed themes of friendship with the U.S., a desire to consult closely on all issues and to deal with the most sensitive ones frankly and away from the press. He assured the Ambassador of continuity in Italy's engagement in Afghanistan and in its contributions to Iraqi reconstruction. Parisi looks forward to meeting SecDef Rumsfeld at the June 7-8 NATO Defense Minister's meeting. An unassuming, mild-mannered academic, Parisi struck a tone of openness and interest in building on the already excellent U.S.-Italy defense relationship. ACTION REQUEST at Para 5. End Summary.

Italian Foreign Policy Based on Friendship with U.S.

¶2. (2) Ambassador Spogli paid an introductory call on new Italian Defense Minister Arturo Parisi on May 23. Parisi opened by telling the Ambassador that he hoped they would be in frequent contact and would meet as often as our bilateral agenda required. He spoke of the long tradition of cooperation and partnership between the U.S. and Italy, and underlined that the two principal points of the Prodi government's foreign policy would be friendship with the United States, and building a strong Europe. The Ambassador assured him that he and the Embassy staff would always be available for any matter the Minister wanted to discuss. Parisi agreed with the Ambassador to address sensitive issues in direct conversations and to avoid surprises, and noted that when the press leads discuss of an issue it often makes matters worse.

Iraq

¶3. (C) Parisi informed the Ambassador that, with the government formation process now complete, the cabinet would hold its first meeting on the delicate question of Iraq May ¶24. The Ambassador told Parisi that the USG was aware of

Italy's plans for transition to a civilian-led presence in Iraq with a military component for force protection, and offered that the U.S. would welcome discussion with Italy of any concerns it had as it made that transition. Parisi replied that Italy would continue down the path it had set out, consulting with the Iraqi government, making the transition punctually, and synthesizing the various sensitivities involved as it contributed to the reconstruction of Iraq.

¶4. (C) As the new GOI leaders start making detailed decisions about their way forward in Iraq, our interests will be taken into account by them if Italian leaders hear first hand from a senior USG Iraq policy maker what our own plans are and what concerns, if any, we have with Italy's intentions.

¶5. (C) ACTION REQUEST: That Washington send a senior representative or team to Rome to consult with the new GOI leaders on Iraq in the next month. End Action Request.

Afghanistan

¶6. (C) The Ambassador told Parisi that the U.S. greatly appreciated Italy's contributions in Afghanistan, including its leadership of ISAF, and looked to Italy to continue making key contributions there, especially as the mission in Afghanistan becomes more difficult. Parisi said that the Italian government's program was clear and there was broad unity behind continuing the current Italian contributions in Afghanistan.

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¶7. (U) Parisi said he looked forward to a first chance to meet SecDef Rumsfeld at the June 7-8 NATO Defense Ministerial.

Bio Note and Comment

¶8. (C) Parisi is a close confidant of PM Prodi, who he knows from their time together as university professors in Bologna. Parisi, a political centrist, is married to a teacher of handicapped children and has two grown sons. He was born in Naples, where he attended a military school (Nunziatella) but grew up in Sassari in Sardinia. He is also close to Sardinian Regional President Renato Soru. He has been an academic for most of his life. In his meeting with the Ambassador, he was mild-mannered, friendly and thoughtful. He twice highlighted the importance Italy places on its friendship with the United States. Parisi strikes us initially as someone with whom we can have a positive working relationship.

SPOGLI